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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/16/2018

TAGS: PGOV PREL NATO AF NL

SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS/AFGHANISTAN: AMBASSADOR ARNALL
SUMMONED OVER LA TIMES ARTICLE

REF: LA TIMES 1/16/08 ARTICLE "GATES FAULTS NATO
FORCES IN SOUTHERN AFGHANISTAN"

Classified By: Ambassador Roland Arnall, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (SBU) This is an action request; please see para 3.

¶2. (C) Defense Minister Eimert van Middelkoop summoned Ambassador Arnall January 16 to discuss an article appearing in the Los Angeles Times (reftel) in which Secretary Gates reportedly criticized NATO forces -- Canada, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands -- currently deployed in southern Afghanistan as incapable of combating a guerrilla insurgency. In a cordial meeting, van Middelkoop expressed dismay over the comments reported in the article, and asked for clarification. He noted that he had met Secretary Gates five times over the past year, and had hoped the two had established a solid working relationship. If there are disagreements over strategy, van Middelkoop said, then they should be discussed "quietly among friends, and not aired in the press." He noted that PM Balkenende has requested an explanation. Van Middelkoop said the comments as they currently stand potentially could ignite "anti-American" feelings in the Netherlands, and further "drive a wedge" among Allies.

¶3. (SBU) Action request: Post requests immediate Washington guidance in response to van Middelkoop's request for clarification, especially given the fact that Amb. Arnall delivered January 15 a letter of appreciation from Secretary Gates to van Middelkoop regarding the Dutch decision to extend their ISAF mission in Afghanistan.

Arnall